Statement by

Ignacio Lopez
Editor and Publisher of El Espectador
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For some years I am on record as opposing the bracero program and you can check this on the files of my newspaper. There are several reasons for my feelings. When the program first started, back in 1942-1943, we did not ~~ned~~ need this supplemental labor regardless of what anybody might have claimed. They were in competition with our own local citizens and to be very frank about it it was to my own interest to see that the local Mexican-Americans were steadily employed. When they are, it means I am able to sell more advertising and more newspapers.

Now after the program had been in operation for some time, it is true that on the surface, at least, ~~it~~ there began to be a shortage of local labor, but this was a wholly arfificial shortage; as a matter of fact, there was a labor surplus created by the importation of the Nationals. Wages could be and were driven down and working conditions made such that Mexican-Americans simply could not accept them, consequently the local people withdrew from the farm labor market. I will give you an example of the sort of thing I have in mind. Over many years it had become traditional that the local people would not be required to pick in the orange groves on foggy days and we ~~man~~ have many sucy days in the winter as you know. The thing is that the leaves of the trees get wet and when your picking oranges you have to go in and out among the leaves and when the weather is foggy you get soaking wet in a matter of minutes and when you get wet you get colds and flu and maybe even pneumohia. But the bracero, who came in weren't acquainted with this tradition, so when the boss told them to go into the groves no matter what the weather was like, they went right ahead and didn't complain. To give you another example: The Mexican-Americans ~~wh~~ from this area who had had many years experience in citrus work were able to size up the quality of a grove just by looking at it and were able to tell if it would be worth their while picking on a piece ~~rather~~ rate basis or more.If the crop uwas very ~~thinhe~~ thin they would demand a guarantee and the growers were accustomed to giving it to ~~eh~~ them/ But the braceros came in here green. He had had no experience pciking

citrus before and furthermore he was naturally very shy and reluctant to complain so once again he ~~did~~ would go in without hestitation and pick any grove that the boss told him to, no matter how scanty the crop. The same thing is true, I might say, all up and down the state in all the other crops such as cotton and so forth.

Well, as I say as the result of many years of this kind of competition there may now appear to be a legitimate need for braceros in the citrus instry, by and large, only the very old or the very young members of the local Mexican community are available for this type of work, meaning that only they are willing to accept the conditions.

In 1948 and 1949, between the time that the World War 2 program ended and public law 78 went into effect, we had a time of it. The growers got so hard up for pickers ~~they~~ that they were forced to start a day-haul program. They were bringing in people from Main Street in L.A. in busses. These guys were nothing but 'winos' the poorest kind of help you can imagine. Now I recognize that the growers have a real problem and so I offered some ideas. I told them that I would be willing to take part in a campaign to glamourize farm labor and to make it attractive to local people. Once more I suggested a number of fringe benefits. For example: I suggested that there be competition between crews with prizes for the crew which came out on top and a number of things of this sort and we played this up big in my paper. Unfortunately the whole effort came to very little because of one theing the growers were never willing to agree not to bring any more braceros and I felt the campaing could only succeed if we could be assured that there would be none of this competition for a period of years.

I have always felt that I was a friend of the growers, as well as a friend of the workers. I have always tried to play far with the growers. Some years ago the A.F.L. sent an organizer in here who tried to take our workers out on strike and I felt that he was doing more harm than good. He was asking for impossible demands and the growers couldn't and wouldn't meet, so what he did was go to the local association and and I said now look here you want to get your fruit picked, we want

to pick it at a fair wage. If you offer 5¢ more per box I think the men will go back to work. The association said o.k. and the next day the men were back on the job and this A.F.L. organizer was out in the cold.

I am a good friend of Ernie Gallarza and I ~~am~~ admire him in many ways and sympathize with the things he is trying to do, but I don't think that he and his union go about the things in the right way. I am afraid that as the years have gone by Gallarza has become more and more less effective. His book Strangers in Our Land, is an example of this. It is written in such a way that anybody can poked holes in it and nobody is going to be convinced.

You say that you are interested in the relations between the bracerpsand the the community in which they live on near which they live. Well first of all I think you should remember that the community feelings towards this men are a natural carry over from the war, when communities always tended to look with suspicious at large concentrations of single men in the various menx camps which sprang up on the outskirts of the towns. These musgivings were often justified, I think you will admit. Now add to that the fact that in this case the large concentration of single men is none Caucausin and none English speaking and add to that the fact that these men can be easily identified when they come into town because of the costumes which they almost always wear, the sombreros and so forth. And you can easily see that the situation is ripe for considerable feelings of suspicion and of separateness. The situation is aggravated by what might be called the conspiracy of silence, which surrounds these men and the camps where they live and the entire bracero program Almost nothing is said about it in the newspapers or magazines, radio, magazines,. T.v. or anything else and what we do no know we tend to fear.

The growers attitued is that these men ~~can not~~ come here to work period. They say we don't want anything to interfere with that, therefore, they make no effort to work the bracero into the community. They make no effort to make the bracero feel at home. To have them visit in local homes, for example, or anything of this sort. They feel that once the bracero becomes part of the community and the community feels

that hs is part of it, that the man will become distracted and will be a poorer worker personally. I feel that the growers are dead wrong. I think a job of proper relations here would be to the best interest of all concerned, including the farmer.

It is a peculiar thin even the local businessmen who have a great deal to gain by making contacts with the braceros are ignoring them. As a result traveling salesmen who drive busses ~~visit~~ vested up as stores are going around to the camps and selling the men clothes and what not. And also company stores right in the camps are getting great deal of business which would otherwise be going to the local businessmen.Here again I will confess that I am speaking with a certain amount of self interest since when the local businessmen make money, I make money through the fact that they advertise with me.

Another thing I think should be said about is relations between t he bracero and the community at large, is that the life of the bracero inevitably tends to take on something of the color and flavor of the community. These men do not, after all, live in a vacume. Now for example, Cucamong was for many years a center of all sorts of vice and violence and health problems and everything that you could mention . It was an unincorporated area served by the county,and sheriff's department and the other official agencies could not and would not clean things up. As you know there is a large bracero camp in Cucamonga and over the years that camp has had more problems than probably any other in the whole state. The men were getting V.D. from the local prostitutes, they were becoming addicted to narcotics from the local dope pushers. they were going into town and getting stabbed and beaten up and robbed; they were spending all their money on liqor and gambling and all the rest of it. I agitated against those conditions as hard as I could for several years finally the Consul closed the camp because as you know in the international agreemtnt there is a provision that the men are to be kept free from degrading influences. Well, the end of the story isn't quite so happy because there are many powers at work here and within a month the camp was open again, however, I will say that the sheriff's office and the San Benardino County Health Department and various others have improved

conditions in Cucamonga to a considerable extent.

There are a good many ~~contracts~~ contacts between braceros and local Mexican-American girls. I have heard a number of the local girls talking about this and it appears that they go for the braceros because they are such smooth talkers. As you may know if you have been in Mexico, particularly an area like Jalisco, people talk in almost a poetic way and many girls find this line very attractive particularly by contrast with the line of the local boys. The local fellows like to act tough they don't want to mess around with anything poetic and in this respect they tend to suffer by comparision with the Nationals. Bracreros are also about to form attachments with some of the local women who ~~maybe~~ may be a little homely or ~~have~~ for one reason or another haven't beeen able to snag alocal man. As a matter of fact I think you would find a number of cases in which braceros have married old-maids who may be considerably older than they are, which is quite the reverse. The general tendency in Mexico.

It would be reasonable to assume that thses contacts between the Nationals and the local girls should arose considerable jealousy and ill feeling on the part of the local boys and to an extent, I am sure this is true but actually there is a surprising lack of friction so far as I have been able to observe and ~~I am~~ when there is a marriage between a bracero and a Mexican American girl, although there may be a bit of stand-offishness ~~and~~ at first it doesn't take long before the bracero is fully accepted and obsorbed into ~~the~~ the family group and friends.

Another way in which there is a certain amount of contact between the men from the local camp and the local community is that from time to time a group of musicians will come in from the camp and entertain at a dance or at a service club meeting or one a radio program or one of the Mexican holodays such as the 5th of May. And when they do come in they tend to be very well received. To be very frank about it they are not really very good musicians but, people here in town don't seem to mind that and they really seem to appreciate the effort that the men are making. I used to have a radio program early in the morning and there was one group of 4 men who used to

to go to the trouble of coming in Sunday mornings and playing and singin on my radio program and I could got a lot of very favorable mail concerning them. I was surely sorry when they had to go back to Mexico.

Still another way in which there is a certain amount of contact between the men from the camps and the local Spanish speaking community is in the church. I believe that the local priest used to make it a point to go out to the camp from time to time But he doesn't do that any more. I believe arrangements have been made so that now the men will are able to get into town and not only attend mass but are able to participate in various other activities at the local church.

Now you ask what particular problems I would look into if I were in charge of your study. Well, there are several things besides those I have already mentioned which particularly intrigue me. For one thing I would like somebody to look into the way in which these men are exploited in Mexico before they come up here and after they return and even more fundamentally I would like somebody to answer the question of how there is the disease of morid f mordida in Mexico. And how it is so widely spread and deeply rooted. I would like to know if the Braceros take it for granted that they will be exploited in the course of their contract, whether they assume that this is a part of the nature of things and therefore don't complain aout it. I would like to know to what extent the disease of mordida has been carried over into the U.S. in the wake of this program and whether the braceros take it for granted that they will be exploited by coyotes here and that this is something fit and proper. Whenever anyone in a bracero camp performs any small service for one of the men, such as mailing a letter or cashing a check or some sending a money order, he expects to be paid for this. You or I would never think of paying somebody to mail a letter for us but this goes on all the time with the braceros. I would like to find out how many of these so called tips are legitimate and how many are simply a racket, simply an extension of the mordida system into this country.

Another problem that I would like to investigate and this is somewhate related to the one I just mentioned is this: What is the role of the camp lieutenants, the men they call camperos. These men I suspect have more power than the is frequently realized and I suspect they frequently use this power in an undesirable way. They are frequently former braceros themselves who have now come into the country under visas arranged by the associations and actually run the camps so far as the men are concerned. While the head managers are busy with other things. The camperos lives right in the camp andis frequently a minor despot with his own little kingdom. He is in a position to extract all sorts of tributes from the vassals For example he is in a position to send a man into a grove in which the picking is known to be very good or if he wishes he can send a man into a grove where the crop is very thin. Now does he take advantage of this position by exerting favoritism? Does he take bribes to send a man into a good grove? I haver heard rumors to this effect but noting definite. I would like very much to find out something more about this.

Still another problem which somebody should look into is the problem of how grievance machinery could be set up, in which the men themselves could take an active part. I can assure you that these men have a very strong sense of justice. I do not believe that this sense of justice is being fully met by the existing machinery for handling complaints. There should be a way in which they can get together with the camp managers or with the crew leaders or with the growers or even with the association's Boar of Directors if necessary in order to fully air their grievances. Nothing of the sort is correctly provided for and I think it should be. It would not be easy to set up, I realize, but as a beginning at least I would like to see somebody procedural the problems involved.

Still another problem which intrigues me a good deal is the extent to which the dining and wining of Mexican officials by the growers influences their view point and their judgment. The Consuls are theoritically, of course, supposed to represent the interest of the Mexican National. but they frequently have very little contact of a

social character particularly with the braceros. Where as they have a dreat deal of contact social and otherwise with the growers and the growers representatives. I will give you an example of the way in which this can work. Some years ago there was a fellow managing the Riverside and Redlands branero camps. Well, he may have had a very good salary, he may not have, but one way or another he became extremely wealthy and got very friendly with the Mexican Vice Consul in San Benardino. This was the man who was sopposed to handle the grievances of the nationas in the Redlands and Riverside camps. Well the camp managers arranged for the Vice Consul to get a Cadillac. It happened that the Vice Consul was a good friend of mine and I kind of kidded him about it. He knew where he had gotten the Cadillac and he knew that I knew. One day just for fun I asked where did you get that big black Cadillac and he answered me in this way : "Do you know why a big black Cadillac is like a prostitute?" I said no, I didn't know and he said "because you can always be sure that there is a son of a bitch inside."